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say that a native would give anything he possessed or do anything he was asked simply in order to get a piece of meat. White men get carriers easily if they are reputed to be good shots. A chief is readily supplied with tribute labour if he has a hunter able to get him meat. Each kill is the subject of universal conversation for days. Every atom of a killed beast is devoured down to the ultimate entrail, in whatever state of decay. Small shreds of flesh are dried over the fire and lovingly stored in a corner of the owner's hut, whatever the smell. Different parts of the animal are regularly graded in order of preference and are distributed according to rank or position in the kinship group. Choice morsels are strapped on bicycle carriers and carried long distances in scorching sun as presents for chiefs. I timed a three-year-old girl during the hunger season, crying for nearly two hours 'just for a little piece of meat', but it must be admitted that this was in a village near a white settlement where she must have known that meat could have been got if her parents had had the money to pay for it.

Fish is not valued so highly as meat, but it certainly ranks as the next favourite relish and it is more easily obtained. Caterpillars, which form a very common relish during the rainy season, are not considered as meat, nor do they form a favourite relish, although they must certainly be reckoned as providing animal protein.

This attitude to meat shows in a striking fashion the way in which a physiological craving easily accounted for in an area of pronounced shortage of animal protein and salt, becomes associated with all sorts of social and psychological desires. Meat is not only good to eat but it is so rare as to make a break in the daily monotony of food and life. It is a sudden unexpected stroke of good fortune and therefore means that the spirits are on the mortals' side. It means plenty and the royal way of living at the chief's court. It is an occasion for a feast. For all these reasons a village sometimes reacts to the presence of meat in a way that is quite out of keeping with its purely physiological value. This is specially the case when the supply of meat is unusually large. When a buck has been distributed in a small village, the natives claim that it is the meat itself which makes them feel strong, and keen to dance all night and to work next day. But in reality it is probably their excitement at the sudden change of diet, their pleasure at the sight of

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CHAPTER V

# GRANARY AND KITCHEN

## *Bemba Methods of Storage*

•251 BEMBA methods of storage are important from the nutritional point of view. In a tribe with little or no system of trade or barter the diet depends very largely on the amount and types of different foodstuffs that can be successfully stored. Efforts to encourage increased production of native crops are almost useless without a detailed study of their methods of preservation. This chapter, therefore, describes which foods the Bemba are able to store, how they do so, and also, an equally important question, the native system of estimating the amount of food he has available for any given period of time. The accumulation of food as a measure of wealth, legal rules of ownership, and the magico-religious beliefs regarding storage, will be dealt with in a later section of the book.

## *Storable Foods*

1. *Grains.*

Millet is the only food stored in large quantities. In fact the word *ubutala* (plur. *amatala*) means essentially a millet granary. The grain is stored in the head, dried first in the sun. It is apparently possible to store millet for three or more years, although the natives' supplies are rarely sufficient to enable them to do so. Millet more than a year old is known as *comba*, and is said to be better for brewing beer than for making porridge, but I do not know whether this change in the quality of the grain could be prevented by better storing. As it is, a careful housewife will keep the older grain apart from the new, and at a chief's court it is common to find a half empty granary of *comba* kept entirely for beer. But in the case of a commoner the amount of grain actually stored from one season to another appears to be very small in this area.[1] This question may become of greater practical importance if the natives' ideas of accumulating food should change in the future.

Kaffir corn does not keep well as it appears to be attacked

[1] Cf. p. 36, for figures.

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by small insects. This may be one of the reasons for the ousting of what is apparently the older Bemba crop by the more easily stored red millet,[1] and the small quantities of Kaffir corn grown nowadays are usually reaped head by head as it ripens and eaten at once.

Maize is also eaten fresh for the most part. A basket of 30 or 40 cobs may be kept in the granary for the few dishes of dried maize eaten, or they may be hung outside the walls, or on a tree.[2] I only saw one maize granary in the territory, and that had been built by a native who had had experience of cultivation in a European plantation in Southern Rhodesia, and was experimenting with ploughed fields of maize.

2. *Ground-nuts.*

Every Bemba reckons to store ground-nuts, however small a quantity, since they are such an essential element of his diet. Men of substance build small separate storing bins about half the height of ordinary granaries, while others keep their nuts in carrying baskets with the millet crop. The ground-nuts are always stored in the shell, which probably preserves their freshness, but they are first dried in the sun. Natives make a great distinction between the fresh nuts (*shya shibishi*) and the stored nuts, which are not so succulent and juicy.

3. *Other Foodstuffs.*

The other foodstuffs used by the Bemba are only stored in small quantities of 50 lb. or less in small containers inside their granaries. The seeds of late sowings of beans, sugar peas, and cow peas are left to shrivel up completely in the sun on the garden beds and then carried home in baskets and stored. *Legume leaves* to be used for storing (*ayanakila*) are cut while the plant is still green, any time from February to April. They are then left to dry in the full sun for a day or more, when the shrivelled remains are stored in gourds or leaf containers. It will be noted that the exposure to the sun is as prolonged as possible by this method of

[1] In 1933–4 I found three chiefs with separate Kaffir corn granaries, and, as we saw, this crop is used ritually in some of the ceremonies performed at the capital, but only one commoner had a separate supply of this grain. I never saw more than about 200 lb. stored. Mr. C. G. Trapnell tells me Kaffir corn is quite commonly planted in some other areas I did not visit.

[2] The peasants of the Austrian Tyrol always store their maize in the open air.

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251 drying—a process which is believed to destroy the vitamin content of vegetables.[1]

*Gourds, fruit, &c.* Gourds may be kept a few months, but not pumpkins. I once saw a small temporary granary of *mpundu* fruit, but I think this is very rare.

*Roots, mushrooms, &c.* Sweet potatoes, mushrooms, and caterpillars are preserved by a process of parboiling (*ukufubula*) and subsequent drying in the sun. These foods are used during the hunger months but are declared to be insipid.

*Cassava* is not stored, but eaten from the beds as wanted.

*Meat and fish* are not preserved in large quantities, because the supply is very scanty, but in each case the raw flesh is smoke-dried [438] over the open fire. There is some trade in dried fish preserved in this way.

### *Granaries and Storing Vessels*

343 361 [487] The approach to a Bemba village is usually up a narrow, overgrown path, winding through untidy beds of pumpkins, beans, or maize. On the outskirts, the first buildings that catch the eye are the village granaries—lath and plaster cylinders with thatched roofs ranged in an irregular circle round the dwelling places.

343 These grain bins are of varying sizes, but measure usually about 10 feet high and 20 feet in circumference, and are raised on uprights about a foot from the ground. Each granary stands as near as possible to its owner's hut, the majority round the outside of the village, but a few scattered here and there inside. To European eyes, they are often untidy and inefficient looking constructions. The supports are sometimes unevenly placed, so that the whole structure seems to tilt to one side. The walls may be whitewashed [531] and painted with red, yellow, and black earth, but more often they are just roughly daubed with clay which cracks in the sun. The grass used for thatching is never cut evenly or bound round the edge, and therefore hangs in wisps of different lengths. But these granaries, though they do not conform to our artistic standards, are nevertheless the measure by which the prosperity of a village is very largely judged. Many huts with few grain bins mean few adult male householders in the community. Cracking walls, or

[1] Cf. the statement that the women of Nigeria dry their leaves in the shade in order to preserve their food value, quoted E. B. Worthington, 'Food and Nutrition of the African Native', *Africa*, vol. ix, 1936, p. 158.

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[facing p. 84]



Building a Bemba granary.



Plastering the granary walls.



Climbing the granary ladder to get out supplies.

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343 356 the *ubutala* to ward off ants, but more often than not the life of a granary is only two to three years. Nor can rats be kept outside for long.

•251 [417] *Filling the granary.* All food is dried in the sun before storing. Drying-racks (*icintambi*, plur. *ifintambi*) are built outside each village. These are rough platforms about 6 feet by 2 feet across, raised on uprights 8 feet high, and reached by a notched climbing-pole. On it are piled heads of millet, sorghum, or other crops to be dried before storing. The millet harvest is sometimes put temporarily in a rough field granary (*nkoloso*), usually made of plaited reeds, before it is carried into the village. As the gardens are often eight or more miles from the village, the convenience of this arrangement is obvious. Later the millet is carried into the village by the women [415] in the big round baskets (*umuseke*, plur. *imiseke*) which contain 40 to 50 lb. The roof of the granary is lifted off and each basket is emptied in one at a time, with the appropriate magic of food-preservation (cf. pp. 206–8). When the whole supply of grain has been emptied into the bin, it must be trodden down hard (*ukushindaila*), a process which the natives consider very important for the preservation of their crop. Next, the roof must be raised into position, and the entrance barred with transverse logs.

[417] To take out the grain, the owner leans a primitive ladder of notched logs (*umutanto*, plur. *imitanto*) against the granary, clambers up, removes the barricade across the entrance, squeezes through the narrow aperture, sometimes raising the roof as she does so, and swings herself down into the dark interior of the bin by the platform bars.

[45] Precious seeds or dried legumes are often kept in a clay water-pot (*umutondo*) or gourd, the mouth of the vessel being plastered over with a layer of clay (*ukumashila*). This is apparently an efficient method of storage, and protects all crops except Kaffir corn from rats and insect pests. Another method of storing legumes or [482] ground-nuts is to make one of the grass carriers known as *umubamba* (plur. *imibamba*). It is common to see natives going about the country carrying round egg-shaped bundles of grass tied with a 415 net-work of bark strands, and containing a hundred pounds or so 251 of seeds. The European is at a loss to understand how a ball about 2 feet in diameter can be made of unplaited grass, and how the beans are inserted in the middle. In fact, the method is ingenious. A round or oblong hole about 18 inches across and a

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foot deep is dug in soft ground. Strands of bark are laid criss-cross over the hole, sometimes with short sticks beneath to strengthen them. A bundle of grass is then spread out on top of the bark fibres and the ground-nuts or beans poured into the lined hole. More grass is then laid on top of the pile and the bark strands beneath pulled up and knotted firmly on top of the bundle, the projecting ends of grass being cut off smooth. The *umubamba* is then complete, light and easy to carry, but giving no protection against mice or white ants. The same is true of the smaller balls, made on the same principle with broad leaves instead of grass (*icifunda*, plur. *ififunda*), which are often used.

Gourds, baskets, or *imibamba* are usually kept inside the granary, balanced on the two transverse rods that make its top platform. Sealed pots of food are sometimes kept in the owner's hut. The *ubutala* platform has, in fact, a haphazard 'untidy' appearance to the European eye—the very reverse of what a well-stocked store-room should be.

Here the European is led to ask whether there is any special value in storing food in vessels of symmetrical shape or size ranged in a given order, as is the custom in the European store-cupboard, or whether the haphazard collection of receptacles found in a Bemba granary are just as efficient. It is obvious that the tins and bottles of the English housewife serve partly to keep air, damp, and animal or insect pests from the food, a function which is fulfilled fairly well by the Bemba granary and sealed jars, less well by the grass bundles and open baskets. But they also help the housewife to keep different foods separate, to save her time in searching for them, and to keep her aware of the quantities of food she has available. Her jars provide her with a rough system of measurement. Now, time is not a valuable commodity in Africa, and the Bemba housewife is quite prepared to sort out three types of relish kept in one vessel. But there is no doubt that the paucity of containers used by the Bemba often causes them to keep seeds for sowing and seeds for eating in the same receptacle, sometimes with unfortunate results. A woman with small supplies of beans, cow peas, or sugar peas seals them up in the same vessel and takes out a handful rather at hazard to cook or to sow. I have known families to eat their next year's seed in this way. Others may be more careful, select their seeds with discrimination and keep them apart, but in any case it is difficult to calculate the quantities

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of food stored in irregular-shaped vessels like gourds of different sizes. It is not impossible that any educational authority which gave time to the invention of separate storing vessels, roughly speaking of the same size, might gradually improve the process of seed-selection in this area, and also the power of the housewife to calculate the amount of food she has stored.

The problem of estimating the amount of millet available at any period of the year is another difficulty. From the outside the Bemba grain bin is simply an opaque lath and plaster cylinder, through which the height of the grain cannot be measured. Crawling through the entrance at the top, the housewife descends on to the flat surface of the millet. Its level can be roughly measured by the circular withes (*amabango*) described on p. 85, and the woman will say of her millet at the beginning of the season that it is 'up to the second or third withe'. But these bands are very irregularly placed, varying from 15 inches to 2 feet apart, and the builders seem to make no effort to measure the distances more equally. Very few natives seem to count the number of baskets of millet they put into the granary at harvest time, although the men, at any rate, are prepared to have a shot at the figure when asked. It did not usually tally with the rough estimate I made by measuring the circumference and height of the pile of grain. One man guessed 10 baskets, i.e. 500 lbs., whereas the weighed contents proved to be 350 lbs.

The problem, then, is whether the householder knows how much grain he has in his granary, say as compared with what he had last year, and whether his wife is able to calculate how long her food will last and to apportion it accordingly. The answer can only be reached by observing her methods of taking grain from the bin. The woman describes the process of taking out millet from the granary (*ukubansa*) as a very difficult task. 'Only old women know how to look after the food' (*ukutentembe filyo*—to care for or to plan out supplies).[1] To take out the grain, the housewife does not fill her basket from the top, as we might have expected, but scoops out the millet round each side until a column of grain is left standing in the middle of the granary. This may be a half cone leaning against one wall (*cinsenene*), or the pile formed by cutting off segments of the circle each side (*yombe*), or

[1] Cf. The slow process of education of the girl described in Chap. VIII.

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804 inside marking, or widespread education in counting the number of baskets put in and taken out, would make foresight more possible, and probably act indirectly as an incentive to increased production.

●251 To conclude, the Bemba system of storage[1] allows them to keep their staple crop for a period of about a year, but is hardly efficient enough to make it possible to accumulate for longer periods. Their type of granary, combined with their system of calculation, prevents them from estimating with European precision the size of their crop. They know methods of preserving most of their accessory foodstuffs, however tasteless the results of the process. But in actual fact only very insignificant quantities of legumes and other vegetables are stored, and the people are still largely dependent on the bush for relishes, except in the months immediately after harvest.

### *The Bemba Kitchen*

372 Bemba methods of cookery depend on their type of fire-place and their cooking vessels. All heating is done over an open wood fire burning slowly on the floor of the hut with no chimney to draw up the smoke. The cooking vessels are placed directly over the fire supported on three conical clay stands (*amaphwasa*) about 1 foot high and 9 inches in diameter cemented on to the floor.

415 Bemba cooking vessels consist of open earthenware pots of various sizes and shapes which the enamel saucepans of the Europeans are only gradually beginning to oust. The largest pot used for making *ubwali* is known as an *inongo*. It is a big round vessel with an open mouth about 2 feet in diameter, but narrowing in slightly to form a neck. Each housewife reckons to have two or three *inongo* for cooking, but they are too heavy to carry to the river for water. For this purpose she uses a smaller pot with a narrower neck known as a *umutondo*. She may also cook stews in such a pot or in the little bowls about 9 inches in diameter known

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[1] Other methods of storage are found among a number of the Central African tribes, e.g. the Ila build granaries on the walls of their huts with clay grain receptacles on the platforms (Smith and Dale, op. cit., vol. i, p. 121). Some of the Luba tribes in the Congo also build grain stores inside the hut, but keep maize and legumes outside on platforms on trees in grass containers (P. Colle, *Les Baluba*, 1913, p. 133). The Akele also store food in bundles tied to high platforms built in the centre of the village and thus protect the food from rats and mice (*Les Bushongo*, Torday and Joyce, 1925, p. 91).

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241 crops of different kinds are sown together and the reaper must distinguish each apart and return to the field as each ripens.[1]

251 Millet is sometimes stored in temporary granaries (*nkoloso*) out in the fields, and then the grain must be brought home basket by basket to the permanent store in the village—sometimes as much as a week's work. To fill the granary the roof is raised, and the millet tipped in from baskets and then trodden down, and this process brings the cycle of millet cultivation to a close.

241 It will be seen that in this form of cultivation the people's emotions seem entirely centred round one process—a particular method of tree-cutting which is their pride and delight, and closely associated with an elaborate form of ritual to be described later (cf. pp. 367–72). It is this activity which the Government has constantly tried to discourage. Since the early days of the B.S.A. Company, white officials have argued with Bemba chiefs on the subject and the district notebooks at Kasama give reports of visits to the district by governors and other officers, who evidently instructed gatherings of chiefs to forbid the cutting of trees. The answer of the Bemba was, in effect, 'If we don't cut trees, we shan't have any food.' Finally, in 1907, a definite order prohibiting tree-cutting was promulgated, with the inevitable result that the people grew practically no millet, and in at least one district they had to be fed by the Government for fear they should starve. The effort was then abandoned. It is true that these orders were issued to the natives without any suggestion, apparently, as to an alternative method of cultivation. The research at present undertaken may result in the necessary discovery.[2] But it is doubtful whether any system of 'cultivating on the ground' (*ukulima panshi*) will have—at any rate for some years—the glamour of the old, and it seems likely, ironically enough, that those very factors which were formerly important incentives to production—the cultural emphasis on the value of tree-cutting and the religious rites associated with it (cf. Chap. XVII)—will act at the present day as barriers in the way of change.

[1] At Citimukulu's, in an old garden, I saw a woman reap once early in the year to get self-sown millet (*icimbuka*), next to harvest the *mwangwe*, and lastly the *amale yakalamba* itself.

[2] e.g. Mr. Moffat's suggestion as to the possible adaptation of the Mambwe system of throwing grassland into mounds in the cold weather, leaving them fallow during the dry season, and breaking up the hillocks during the rains and scattering the millet seed broadcast over the flattened surface in January and February. op. cit.

231 encouraged and there are now a few herds in the valley. Horses and mules are lacking. The donkey ridden by Gamitto when he made his entry in 1830 was the first of the species to be seen in the country.(1) The villagers keep poultry and some small stock, mainly goats and sheep.

FISHING

226 Fish abound in the Luapula, the riverside lagoons and Lakes Mweru and Mofwe. Livingstone collected the vernacular names of thirty-nine species caught in Lake Mweru.(2) Some fishing goes on all the year round but the season, when the men move to the fishing camps on the river islands, extends from September to January. In the shallow marshland pools the fish are speared while laying their eggs. In flowing water they are trapped in conical wickerwork baskets set in rocky falls or in the openings in a weir.(3) On Lake Mweru they are caught from canoes with hook and line. On the Luapula the people go out in their dugouts at night and drive the fish into seine-nets (*ubukonde*) by hitting the surface of the water with wooden discs attached to poles.(4) Large-scale fishing is done with drag-nets (*umukwau*) which require several men to pull them. Formerly nets were made by men from barkcloth cord. Nowadays nylon and cotton nets are used. Vegetable poisons and stupefacients, now banned, were employed in the past.

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HUNTING

223 Hunting and fowling are spare-time activities. Elephants and buffa-
224 loes, which in Livingstone's time used to be chased into the Mofwe mudflats during the rainy season and killed in great numbers,(5) are no longer found in Kazembe's country though some still remain on the Belgian Congo side.
[411] Large herds of lechwe antelope roam the swamp country beyond the inhabited belt. Fire-arms have displaced the traditional weapons.

DIET

251 The basic foodstuffs are cassava(6) and fish. Game, poultry, fruit and wild bees' honey, supplement the diet. Cassava is soaked in water,
252 peeled and sun-dried for storing. The root, after being pounded and ground
262 on a stone, is made into porridge and flavoured with groundnuts or other
273 relish. Sweet cassava is eaten roasted.(7) Fish is consumed fresh or dried, game fresh or smoked. Fish, when dried in the sun or over a fire, will keep for three months. Water-lily roots, on which, according to tradition, the aboriginal pygmies fed, are considered a delicacy. Native-made alcoholic beverages were millet beer(8) (still made), *Borassus* palm wine, mead(9) and a spirit distilled from maize.(10) Oil is expressed from palm
276 fruit(11) and from groundnuts and vinegar used to be made from bananas.(12) Tobacco is taken as snuff and smoked in pipes.(13) *Bhang* (hemp), was

(1) Burton, op.cit., p.252.
(2) Livingstone, op.cit., p.245.
(3) Brelsford, 2, 1947, pp.70, 71.
(4) Holmes, 1925, p.26.
(5) Livingstone, op.cit., pp.248, 276, 299.
(6) Burton, op.cit., p.40.
(7) ibid., p.101.
(8) ibid., p.43.
(9) Gamitto, II, p.26; Valdez, II, p.246.
(10) Bowdich, p.91.
(11) Livingstone, op.cit., pp.243, 278.
(12) ibid, p.272.
(13) ibid., p.251; Gamitto, I, p.401.